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## Laveen residents anxious to know path of freeway

*ADOT decision expected by end of next week*

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After years of uncertainty, Laveen residents will soon know whether a proposed freeway will be built in their neighborhood.

The Arizona Department of Transportation is to announce by the end of next week where the western leg of the proposed South Mountain Freeway will connect to Interstate 10.

Whether planners stick to the original path along 55th Avenue, or push the connection west to Loop 101, their decision is anxiously awaited by those whose homes, businesses and commutes could be affected.

"We won't be able to get in and out of our development, and I'm looking at the pollution," said Gloria Chestnut, who lives near the proposed alignment along 55th Avenue. "Property values are definitely going to go down because of the traffic."

ADOT won't issue an official decision on whether to build the South Mountain Freeway until fall 2007. However, planners want to finalize the western alignment now to alleviate the uncertainty holding homeowners, city governments and developers hostage from Laveen to Tolleson.

The freeway will complete Loop 202 and could cost as much as \$2 billion.

A federal study launched in 2001 suggested three potential sites for the western leg to join I-10: Loop 101 (also known as 99th Avenue), 71st Avenue or 55th Avenue. The latter was the original route when the freeway was proposed in 1985.

The 71st Avenue connection, which would have destroyed hundreds of Laveen homes, has no political support and is not considered a viable option.

The two main contenders are Loop 101 and 55th Avenue.

City leaders have lobbied hard during the past two months for the 55th Avenue route. Phoenix points to wide swaths of undeveloped land in the western part of the city as proof that planners have banked on this route for decades. The Loop 101 alignment would blow through tiny Tolleson, devouring much of the six-square-mile city's territory. Officials there have threatened a lawsuit if the state tries to pursue that option.

On the other side of the argument are drivers who see the neat link-up at Loop 101 as the most logical option. A citizen advisory group sponsored by ADOT recommended in April to connect the freeway at that westernmost point.

"Buckeye is growing like crazy, and it just seems odd to have people come so much further east again" to get on Loop 202, said Laveen resident Bette Fitzpatrick, a real estate agent. "To tie it in with the 101 seems smarter."

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